



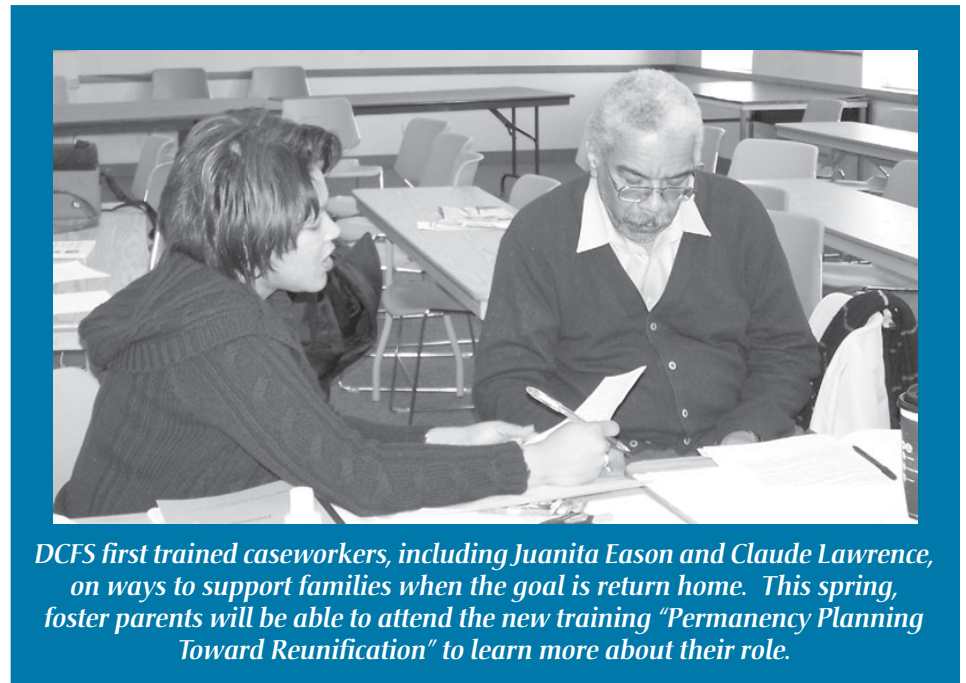
Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by Foster Care, Adoption and Guardianship®

Caregivers, parents and staff connect for reunification

DCFS recently developed new training courses to help caregivers and caseworkers take on the tandem goals of protecting children and reuniting families. For a child to live in one home while his heart remains with another is complicated. This natural conflict is to be expected. But when there is emotional fallout, foster parents see it firsthand. Beyond providing a home, foster parents are vital to minimizing the trauma to a child from being separated from her parents. Caregivers can do this in how they support a child's emotional connection to his family, how they interact with the child's parents, and how they work with agency staff. Success at this balancing act sometimes comes naturally, and other times it can be more challenging. The new course "Permanency Toward Reunification for Caregivers," which will be available this spring, will go into detail about the role that foster parents play when reunification (return home) is the goal.

DCFS and private agency supervisors and caseworkers have already been trained on reunification practices. The new course for caregivers will explain how they will be involved while the parents work



DCFS first trained caseworkers, including Juanita Eason and Claude Lawrence, on ways to support families when the goal is return home. This spring, foster parents will be able to attend the new training "Permanency Planning Toward Reunification" to learn more about their role.

toward reunification. It will also give examples of how foster parents can support children before, during and after a return home.

While many caregivers have worked collaboratively with birth parents, some have not. The reasons for that could involve safety concerns, transportation constraints, risk of the child's emotional well-being, or reluctance on the caregiver's or parent's side. With the renewed efforts toward reunification, DCFS is identifying the hurdles and working to overcome them. The training course will describe the reuni-

fication practice model and introduce caregivers to new concepts including Family Meetings during the Integrated Assessment phase, Shared Parenting and new expectations around visitation.

Family Meetings

Within 48 hours of a case being assigned to a private agency or DCFS foster care program, there will be the First Family Meeting where three things happen. The caseworker will begin preliminary permanency planning with the parents and allow the parent and

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From the Acting Director

Erwin McEwen

The first point in the DCFS mission statement is: *"to protect children who are reported to be abused or neglected and to increase their families' capacity to safely care for them."* The next is *"to provide for the well-being of children in our care."*

Protecting children unfortunately often means abruptly removing them from an unsafe home. Well-being typically translates to moving to a foster home. From that perspective, helping the child's parents could be bumped down on the list of priorities. But, we cannot take our eye off that ball. Parents have to be an important part of the child welfare team.

DCFS is taking a much closer look at how we work to safely reunite families. The "we" that I speak of includes DCFS, private agency staff, and you, the caregiver. We will be asking foster parents to join us in working more effectively with a child's family. Frankly, this is nothing new, as many of you have been doing this all along.

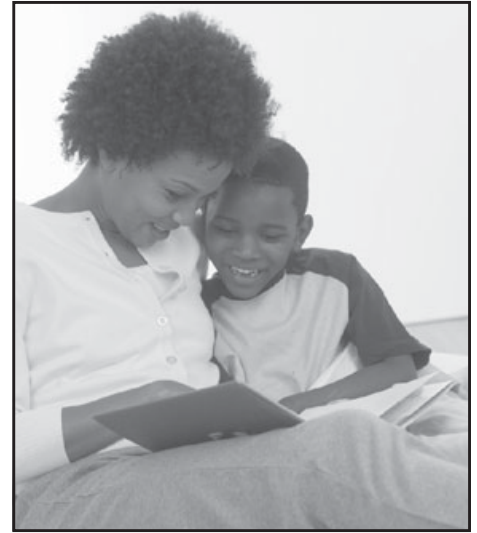
What may be new are the resources we will provide to support this effort. The training courses in reunification for caseworkers and caregivers are a start. We are drafting new policies and detailed guidelines to help parents make and measure progress toward reunification. We must also plan for permanency when reunification can't happen. The mission may be complex, but with your help it will not be impossible.

Connecting for reunification, con't.

child to reconnect through the first parent-child visit. Lastly, the caseworker will introduce the parents and caregivers. In addition to the introductions, the parents and caregivers will go over a new tool called *Let Me Tell You About My Child* with information to better support the new placement. This meeting will take place at the agency and the caseworker will facilitate it. Then, when the case has been open about 35 days, the caseworker will bring the parents and the caregivers back together for another family meeting to go over the Integrated Assessment reports and continue case planning.

Shared Parenting

In the first family meeting, the caseworker will talk about the concept of shared parenting. A child in foster care continues to need the care and attention of his parents, even while he is taken care of in a foster home. As the parents make the needed changes and take steps to stay connected with the child, the foster parent also plays an important part in keeping children and their parents connected. Caregivers will 1) support the parent-child bond 2) actively work with the family to help them achieve the goal of reunification and 3) model effective parenting and discipline strategies for parents. Caregivers do this by sharing some of the typical parenting tasks. The caseworker will build opportunities for shared parenting into the family's service plan that will allow the parent to increase the frequency and level of parenting



responsibilities. This could mean going to school on report card pick-up day or going to doctor's appointments. Shared parenting is a balancing act. The caseworker will also support the caregiver as needed, while keeping communication open between the parent and the foster parent.

Visitation

Frequent and productive visits between the child and parents will be critical to making progress toward reunification. The caregiver will also play a role in visitation that could include: preparing the child for the visit, providing transportation to or from the visits and supporting the child if a visit doesn't go as planned.

As parents make progress, their service plan may also include mentoring visits that involve the caregiver. For example, a parent may want to become more involved with their child's schoolwork. The parent could come to the foster home after school for a mentoring visit. The foster parent could show

Connecting, con't.

them the place in their home set up for schoolwork and let the parent go through the regular routine of checking work and sorting out the book bag. Caregivers should expect that visits will get more frequent and longer as the parents move closer to their goal of reunification.

Even after that is accomplished and parents are reunited with their children, the case will remain open for a time with regularly scheduled caseworker visits. Caregivers and parents may also wish to continue their relationship, even after the child returns home. The two families could decide to work things out with visits, calls or letters, so that the children maintain supportive, lasting connections.

The new practice model for reunification will begin with just the small number of new cases that enter the DCFS system. However, the need to support a child's connection to his or her family comes to bear in some degree in all foster care, guardianship and adoption situations. Caregivers will find the training helpful in building strong, positive family connections no matter what the permanency goal. The Training Page in the regional section of the next newsletter will list the schedule for "Permanency Planning Toward Reunification for Caregivers". For the most up-to-date training information, go the to the DCFS web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs and scroll down to the "Features" tab or call 877-800-3393.

Look for age 0-5 developmental milestones

In 2006, Illinois was chosen as one of only 11 states to pilot a program called Strengthening Families. The initiative uses early childhood education programs to prevent child abuse and neglect. Along with that pilot, DCFS has devoted more resources to identifying developmental delays and providing services. Children in DCFS care ages zero to five should each receive a developmental screening. Caregivers can coordinate the screenings with their caseworker. Children who entered the child welfare system with the Integrated Assessment Program already received screenings. However, as children grow, caregivers should be mindful of their development, in case any problems arise.

Below are the typical developmental benchmarks at various ages. Every child is unique, and while these are not precise measurements they can help caregivers determine when or if to be concerned. As a first step, discuss any issues with the child's caseworker. DCFS also has Early Childhood Coordinators in each of the DCFS regions. Call 312-814-4131 for more information.

At 3 months, most children can:

- Lift their head and chest while lying on stomach
- Show vigorous body movement
- Follow a moving person with their eyes
- Smile when someone speaks to them

At 6 months, most children can:

- Sit with minimal support
- Roll over and sit with minimal support
- Babble to familiar people
- Play peek-a-boo
- Turn to locate sounds

At 9 months, most children can:

- Respond to a simple requests
- Wave "bye-bye"
- Sit alone, crawl
- Feed a cracker to self
- Imitate gestures

At 12 months, most children can:

- Pull themselves up to stand – may step with help
- Pick things up with a thumb and one finger
- Nod their head to signal "yes"
- Give affection
- Say two or three words

At 2 years, most children can:

- Use own name, defend toys
- Kick a large ball
- Match and sort toys
- Use 2-3 words together
- Ask for items by name

At 30 months, most children can:

- Obey two-part commands
- Jump
- Name a picture
- Complete a simple puzzle
- Copy drawn lines

At 3 years, most children can:

- Walk upstairs while holding a rail or a hand
- Stand momentarily on one foot
- Open doors
- Unbutton large buttons
- Verbalize toilet needs
- Stack objects

Protect children from dangerous recalled products

Fortunately, most products are safely made. However, parents have to be diligent about safety risks that are part of everyday life. Clothes, toys and furniture can harbor safety hazards for young children, including asphyxiation, injury or illness. Jacket buttons can cause choking; toys are decorated with lead paint; or cribs can fall apart. DCFS policy requires foster parents of children age six or under to check their homes for products listed as unsafe by the Children's Product Safety Act. The complete list of unsafe products is available from the Department of Public Health at 217-782-4977. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission maintains a product list along with helpful information at www.cpsc.gov. The site also offers a subscription service for automatic email updates. Below are just a few of the products recently recalled.

Firestreet Scooters

Target is recalling 185,000 Firestreet Scooters, manufactured by Triple Win Sports, of Taiwan. The handlebars, wheels and wheel brakes can break and detach, causing the rider to lose control, fall and possibly suffer injuries. Consumers should take these scooters away from children immediately and return the scooter to the nearest Target store for a \$24 gift card, plus applicable sales tax. Contact Target at 800-440-0680.

Phil & Ted's e3 strollers

Regal Lager is recalling 14,300 Phil & Ted's e3 Strollers with double seats. Children can touch the rear tires when in the stroller's add-on seat. This can pose an abrasion hazard to children.

Products were sold by baby furniture and baby products stores nationwide, and Internet retailers from July 2005 through November 2006 for about \$380. Consumers should immediately stop using the additional rear seat in the lower position on top of the rear axle. Contact Regal Lager at 800-593-5522 or visit the firm's Web site at www.regallager.com.

Children's Powerpuff Girls necklaces

Rhode Island Novelty is recalling 48,000 Powerpuff Girls necklaces. The recalled jewelry contains high levels of lead. Lead is toxic if ingested by young children and can cause adverse health effects. The recalled necklaces are multi-colored metal pendants that hang from a black cord. The pendants are in the shape of the head of one of three "Powerpuff Girls" cartoon characters. Consumers should immediately take this jewelry away from children. Consumers should return the recalled jewelry to the store where purchased for a replacement or contact Rhode Island Novelty at 800-528-5599 for information on how to receive a replacement.

Polly Pocket dolls and accessories with magnets

Mattel Inc. is recalling 2.4 million Polly Pocket dolls and accessories. Tiny magnets inside the dolls and accessories can fall out undetected by parents and caregivers. The magnets can be swallowed, aspirated by young children or placed by a child in their nose or ears.



Polly Pocket Hangin' Out House

The recalled Polly Pocket play sets included the Hangin' Out House, Treetop Clubhouse, Spa Day, Totally Tiki Diner, Quik-lik Boutique and City Pretty Playset. The sets were sold at discount department stores and toy stores from May 2003 through September 2006 for between \$15 and \$30. Sets currently on store shelves are not included in this recall.

Consumers should immediately take these recalled toys away from children and contact Mattel at 888-597-6597 to arrange for the return of the sets and to receive a voucher for a replacement toy of the customer's choice, up to the value of the returned product.

New state law requires carbon monoxide detectors near bedrooms

As of January, every home must have a carbon monoxide detector installed within 15 feet of every room used for sleeping. Carbon monoxide, or CO, is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death. CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by stoves, gas ranges, heating systems and engines. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, and people and animals can be poisoned by breathing it.

All people and animals are at risk for CO poisoning. Certain groups – unborn babies, infants, and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or respiratory problems – are more susceptible to its effects. Each year, more than 500 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning.

CO is harmful because when a person breathes in air with high levels of CO, red blood cells pick up CO quicker than they pick up oxygen. If there is a lot of CO in the air, the body may replace oxygen in blood with CO. This blocks oxygen from getting into the body, which can damage tissues and result in death.

People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms that include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.



Just as a smoke detector can warn of a fire, a CO alarm can sense the dangerous gas that humans can't readily detect. CO alarms come as an individual unit, either battery-powered or hard-wired. Under the new law, the carbon monoxide alarm can be combined with a smoke detector if the combined unit complies with the rules and standards for both and has different alarm tones.

Residential owners are responsible for supplying and installing all of the required alarms. Multi-unit buildings also have to have a CO alarm within 15 feet of rooms used for sleeping. In rental units, the tenant is responsible for testing and providing general maintenance, including maintaining the working batteries after move-in. Failure to comply with the state law can result in fines. DCFS is updating licensing policy to reflect this new law. For more information, contact the Office of Child and Family Policy at 217-785-1983 or visit www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm.

Electronic games and computers too hot to handle

Since the beginning of 2000, there have been 226 reported incidents involving electronic game systems. Of those, 107 indicated overheating or fire. The federal government recommends keeping these types of devices in well-ventilated areas, away from heat sources. Do not place them on soft surfaces, such as a bed, sofa or carpeting that can block ventilation openings. Never use equipment with a damaged power supply cord or on an overloaded electrical socket. It is best to turn game systems off when they are not being used.

Similarly, there have been reported incidents with notebook computers involving smoke or fire and overheating. To promote safe use of notebook computers:

- Do not use incompatible computer batteries and chargers.
- Do not use your laptop on soft surfaces, such as a sofa, bed or carpet, because it can restrict airflow and cause overheating.
- Do not permit a loose battery to come in contact with metal objects, such as coins, keys or jewelry.
- Do not crush, puncture or put a high degree of pressure on the battery as this can cause an internal short-circuit, resulting in overheating.
- Do not place the computer in areas that may get very hot.
- Do not get the computer or battery wet.

Can't leave young kids in cars

No one looks forward to taking a sleeping child out of the car seat, just to run inside the store for a gallon of milk. Yet, even what seems like a low-risk situation could result in the injury, abduction or death of a child. Below is an excerpt of the Illinois child endangerment statute:

- It is unlawful for any person to willfully cause or permit the life or health of a child under the age of 18 to be endangered or to willfully cause or permit a child to be placed in circumstances that endanger the child's life or health, except that it is not unlawful for a person to relinquish a child in accordance with the Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act.
- There is a rebuttable presumption that a person committed the offense if he or she left a child 6 years of age or younger unattended in a motor vehicle for more than 10 minutes.
- 'Unattended' means either: (i) not accompanied by a person 14 years of age or older; or (ii) if accompanied by a person 14 years of age or older, out of sight of that person.
- A violation of this Section is a Class A misdemeanor. A second or subsequent violation of this Section is a Class 3 felony. A violation of this Section that is a proximate cause of the death of the child is a Class 3 felony for which a person, if sentenced to a term of imprisonment, shall be sentenced to a term of not less than 2 years and not more than 10 years.

Make plans now for summer camp fun

Three months out of school can create complications for the adults trying to fill that time productively. When youth have special needs, either behavioral or physical, finding the right summer camp is especially important. Fortunately, there are resources to help the child and the caregiver make the best decisions. Talk to the child's caseworker to determine what a child needs and what options are available for summer activities.

The cost of camp is usually the first hurdle. DCFS foster families should ask about the financial assistance available, the approval process and the reimbursement procedures. For private agency foster families, the policy can differ from agency to agency. Every agency receives funds for "nonrecurring expenses" such as camp for some children. Ask the child's caseworker about the camp policy for children at that agency.

Where to begin looking:

- Ask people you know, such as other foster parents or school parents for recommendations.
- Your child's school may have a local camp for sports or academics. Also check out higher education institutions for special programs for elementary and high school children.
- Check the community park districts for programs. In Chicago, youth in foster care can participate with a fee waiver. Contact 312-814-4145 for more details.

- Local churches may have a youth camp or a youth group that plans summer activities. (Be sure to ask about birth parent permission for a religious program).
- Ask your child's caseworker for information on special needs camps focusing on ADHD or physical and developmental disabilities.
- Check organizations like the YMCA, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts for local camps.
- Contact the DCFS Local Area Network (LAN) liaison in your region for community-based programs.
- Check for accredited camps with the American Camping Association. Its list accredited camps that can be searched by location, type or cost. Call 765-342-8456 or visit www.acacamps.org.

Don't forget!

- Check with your caseworker regarding reimbursement procedures.
- Make sure you have proof of a current physical before registration.
- Ask about policies for dispensing medications at camp.
- Ask your caseworker about the policy for traveling to an out-of-state camp.

Start making plans now. It is not unheard of for parents to wait for hours (even overnight!) in line for coveted spots at popular camps. Also, the paperwork to approve funding and consents for travel all take time, so it is best to get started early.

Statewide Council reviews Foster Parent Law plans

The Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans are required of every foster care program. These plans describe how agencies and DCFS regional programs will uphold foster parents' rights and assist them in their responsibilities. The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, by law must receive, review and score each of the plans. That is a time consuming and complex undertaking, and it is just the first step.

Understanding that a plan is just a plan, council members also conduct agency reviews to determine the agency's or DCFS region's compliance with their implementation plan. One-third of the programs come up for review each year. The Council Chair appoints two council members to review each agency or DCFS program. This means working with the DCFS Agency Performance Team to actually visit the agency for face-to-face interviews. The Council also requires telephone surveys with a set number of randomly selected foster parents. This provides another perspective on how the agency's plan translates into everyday practice with foster parents.



Heather
Schumacher

"We've consistently improved our interview questions and measurement standards. We can really get to whether the agency administration and

frontline workers understand what the rights and responsibilities mean for foster parents," said Heather Schumacher, chair of the Policy Committee.

The Council and the foster care programs take these implementation plan reviews seriously.

"The Foster Parent Law is an empowerment tool for foster parents, if they are aware of it and use it. The council is looking out for the best interest of foster children and the foster parents who care for them," said Jerry Welenc, a committee member who was involved on the passage of the Law. "But foster parents must take an active role in asserting their rights."

Foster parents can review their agency's implementation plan. Many agencies proactively mail copies to homes. Agencies are required to document caregiver input to the plan. This often happens in meetings during the fall before the plans are due at the end of December. Foster parents with questions about the plans should contact the Foster Parent Law Liaison at their agency or DCFS regional office. Text of the Foster Parent Law in its entirety is printed in the Foster Family Handbook, which is distributed at Foster PRIDE classes. Contact the DCFS Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422 with further questions about the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

List of 2007 Agency Reviews

- ABJ
- Ada S. McKinley
- Arden Shore
- Beatrice Caffrey
- Camelot
- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Chicago
- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Springfield
- Centers for New Horizons
- Chicago Association for Retarded Citizens
- Children's Place Association
- Counseling and Family Services
- Cunningham
- DCFS Cook Central
- DCFS Cook North
- Family Service Center of Sangamon County
- Generations of Hope
- Guardian Angel Community Services
- Hobby Horse House, Jacksonville
- Kemmerer Village
- Kid's Hope United
- Lydia Home
- Our Children's Homestead
- SOS Children's Villages
- Unity Parenting and Counseling
- Volunteers of America
- Webster Cantrell Hall
- Youth Outreach Services

Adoptive and birth families connect with MAC in the middle

The Midwest Adoption Center (MAC) can help “fill in the blanks” after an adoption. MAC can comb the closed case files to provide written information about the child and his birth family. Caregivers may request that information at any time if they did not receive at the time of adoption or guardianship. MAC can also help locate and establish a connection with any birth family member. One component of that program is “On-going communication service,” allowing adoptive parents of minors or adoptees to communicate with birth relatives without releasing their names and addresses. Adoptive parents may connect with birth parents, adult siblings or other relatives. Exchanges of letters and/or photos can continue as long as both parties so desire.



Gretchen
Schulert

“We help families make a commitment to connection, which can be defined in many ways. In an ideal situation, it is face-to-face, on-going, but there are lots of other situations. Connection is a continuum,” said Gretchen Schulert, Co-Director.

The center’s caseworkers help families sort out what will work best for their needs and can be the buffer between the two parties. In many situations the child doesn’t know that the adults are communicating. When the child is old enough or it’s appropriate, a

parent can say, “I understand how important this is. Every so often, I hear from them and I get a letter.”

Midwest Adoption Center provides consultation and these connection services free to families, on behalf of the Department of Children and Family Services. Contact MAC for more information at 847-298-9096, ext 29.

One family’s story

Gail and James knew that Steve, their teenage son by adoption, was depressed and failing in school. What they didn’t know was whether or not Steve’s birth relatives had similar struggles. They hoped that having more birth family history, including medical and mental health information, would help them help Steve. Their first call to DCFS sent them to Midwest Adoption Center (MAC), the agency that contracts with the Department to provide “closed file information and search services” to families with DCFS involvement.

MAC found several files containing information about Steve and his birth mother and father. Using those files, the MAC caseworker prepared the written report of “non-identifying information” that by law must be given to adoptive parents. The report could not include any personal information that would disclose the parents’ identity. The background in the report was complicated enough that Gail turned to the caseworker for advice on what and how to share it with Steve. The report also

left many questions unanswered. Gail and James decided to try to get more up-to-date medical and mental health information from Steve’s birth parents. But, they did not want contact with the birth family – at least not now. Their MAC worker explained that it was possible to reach out to the parents and exchange information without any direct contact.

Because Steve’s birth mother had moved many times, it took several months to locate her. However, when the MAC worker was finally able to talk with her, she cried when she heard news that her son’s adoptive parents wanted to share. She agreed to share her own health history even though talking about the many problems she had continued to experience was very difficult for her.

Gail and James still felt strongly that direct contact was not a good idea for their family, but realized that it would be important to keep a connection of some kind. The MAC worker explained the “On-going Communication Service” to Gail and James and then to the birth mother. This part of the program allows the adoptive parents and a birth relative to make an agreement to stay in touch, communicating through MAC by letter without releasing their names and addresses to each other. Over the next several months, they decided to exchange letters, and Gail and James were excited to receive some baby pictures of their son along with more family information.

Survey discovers post-adopt services needed

In 2005, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a statute calling for an “in-depth study of post adoption services...and adoption subsidies.” The study would look at three areas:

1. What are recent permanency trends for children in substitute care?
2. What post-adoption services and subsidies are available in Illinois and relative to other states?
3. What post-adoption services do adoptive parents and guardianship caregivers need? How do they spend the subsidies? What costs are associated with raising an adopted child with special needs?

Last year, the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign conducted telephone surveys with a random sample of adoptive and guardianship families. Researchers also did a national survey of public child welfare agencies and analyzed DCFS administrative data. They presented their initial findings to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. Among the highlights were the following data and conclusions:

- More than 90 percent of caregivers felt the impact of the adoption or guardianship on their family was either very positive or mostly positive. Less than 2 percent of caregivers reported having frequent

thoughts about ending their adoption.

- Nearly two-thirds of the families (63 percent) reported they had at least two or three service needs. Within that group, 12 percent of the families had more than seven needs.
- The top three needs were dental care (routine and specialized), day care and counseling.
- Most families that need services reported that they could obtain them – 81 percent of families with needs said they had no unmet service needs.
- Of those with unmet needs, the greatest services were: drug/alcohol treatment, educational advocacy, respite care, preservation services, day care, orthodontist and family therapy.
- Compared to other states, Illinois falls slightly below the average subsidy rate at \$410 per month.
- Illinois provides most of the same services as other states. The exception is residential treatment. Nationally, 72 percent of states provide for residential treatment, where Illinois does not.

More information on the report *Supporting Adoptions and Guardianships in Illinois: An analysis of subsidies, services and spending* can be found in the publications section of the research center’s web site at <http://cfrcwww.social.uiuc.edu>.

Adoption Advisory Council update

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council met in February in Bloomington. Co-chairs Elizabeth Richmond and Jim Jones, and the members set the agenda for an upcoming meeting with the DCFS Director. They also went over the following items:

Post-adoption Services: The Council had further discussion on the findings of a recently published report on post-adoption services. The Council has a standing committee to address issues around services. The committee will review the latest report and reconcile it with other research and direct input from families to determine recommendations.

Training: The Council invited the DCFS Administrator for Training to address the recent restructuring of the training office and upcoming offerings for adoptive and guardianship parents. Judy Zaleski updated the Council on the revised adoption conversion training curriculum.

National Adoption Month: The Adoption Council will take a more active role in planning activities to mark November as National Adoption Month. Several members volunteered to work with DCFS to set a plan.

The next meeting will be April 13, in Springfield. For more information, call the DCFS Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422.

Tell It Like It Is—Readers Respond

Families Now and Forever wants to hear the real deal on caring for children from those who know best...YOU!

Here's what you had to say about the question: ***What safety changes have you made in your home that you might not have thought of before foster care?***

"I already had an infant when I was fostering, so I thought I had everything covered. You don't realize that you still need the cabinet locks even with the six year old that I thought would have known better. My pediatrician is good about reminding me of new safety rules."

-Kate, adoptive mother

"My four-year-old's asthma pump is designed to look cute so she'll like to use it. The humidifier looks like a baby elephant. It is so cute that now I have to keep it hidden in the linen closet, because the other kids want to play with it."

-D. B., foster mom

"It never occurred to me to lock the dish washer. Then I discovered my son had opened it to use it as a step ladder to get to the knives I was trying to keep out of his reach."

-Michele Siedl, adoptive mom

The new question is: ***When was a time that you personally appreciated the fact you became a foster parent?***

You can contact me with your response by e-mail at vanessa.james@illinois.gov or by phone at 312-814-6824. Reader surveys said the *Tell It Like It Is* feature was a favorite. Keep it coming by sending in your response today.

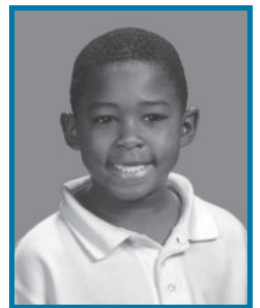
Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390.



Crystallyn (7509)



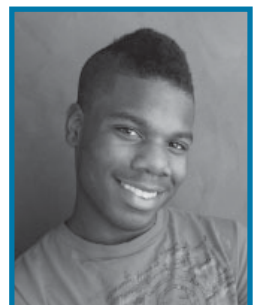
Erica (7567)



Dwight (7578)



Jaiombre (7429)



Lewis (7536)

A family for me

Jaiombre [7429] Jaiombre, 9, is a lovable young man who enjoys music and dancing. He has a real talent for memorizing song lyrics and likes to sing along with his favorite songs. When Jaiombre has one-on-one time with this foster parent, he likes to visit amusement parks and carnivals to go on the rides. He also enjoys watching movies and listening to stories.

His foster parent and teachers both said that Jaiombre can be very sweet and adorable. His worker said he enjoys individual attention. The family for Jaiombre should be patient and loving, and provide a stable home environment. Potential parents should also ensure that Jaiombre receives helpful learning supports and regular medical check-ups.

Lewis [7536] Lewis, 16, is a friendly young man with an outgoing personality. He is very resilient, adjusts quickly to new situations, and gets along well with everyone he meets. In his free time, Lewis likes to listen to music. He also loves to take care of animals, especially dogs.

His teachers said Lewis is a pleasure to spend time with. His attendance is excellent and he works hard at maintaining good grades. The forever family of Lewis would provide lots of love and encouragement. Lewis would like to join a family that is kind, accepting, and supportive.

Crystallyn [7509] Crystallyn, 16, is a musical young lady who enjoys singing and playing the tambourine at church. Her other favorite activities include working on coloring books and riding her bike. She also likes being near her foster mother and often helps her to prepare meals.

Her foster parent said Crystallyn can be very warm and affectionate. She likes to give hugs to the people she's closest with. Parents for Crystallyn would be patient, loving, and kind. When asked about her ideal family, Crystallyn said, "I'd like them to be nice and to do fun stuff." Only families in central Illinois will be considered at this time.

Dwight and Dominique [7578-77] Dwight is an energetic eight-year-old who plays baseball, basketball, and football through the park district. After a game, he relaxes by watching TV or drawing pictures. His older sister, Dominique (not pictured), is fourteen years old and very caring. She always looks out for Dwight, helping him reach items on high shelves or helping him search when he has misplaced a toy. She is the captain of her junior high volleyball team, and she loves to try new activities, like camping, tennis, and racquetball. Dominique is also a gifted writer who creates stories and poems based on her experiences.

Their foster parent said Dwight and Dominique are "good kids who are very family oriented." She said Dwight works hard at school and Dominique is an excellent student who receives all A's and B's. The adoptive family for this pair would be patient and caring and provide them with a structured home life.



Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI web site – www.adoptinfo-il.org if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.



***Illinois Families
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